

occupation with homosexuality and an emphasis on machismo in Mexican and Chicano culture, much of the sexual innuendo common in adolescent male conversation is nearly absent in literature. In short, Chicano homosexuality is still "in the closet." Reinhardt argues that forced secrecy regarding homosexuality is even greater among Chicano writers than among other writers. When homosexuality is dealt with in fiction, it is usually designed to reinforce heterosexual stereotypes of gays and to degrade and deride homosexuals. References to lesbians are even rarer and when included they are brutally derogatory. Lesbians are portrayed as loud, crude, vulgar and profane, if portrayed at all.

Reinhardt's paper should provoke keen interest in and provide a much-needed impetus for further research and literary criticism on the images and attitudes toward gays in Chicano literature. It may also encourage a deeper analysis of the particular stereotypes regarding homosexuality in Chicano culture.

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### Critique

The author speaks truly in stating that gays in literature have remained, for the most part, in the closet. Generally authors have been concerned with presenting a given philosophy, advocating social change, creating aesthetically satisfying literature, not primarily with sexuality, per se. Rather sex has ostensibly served a purpose and has not functioned as a goal, unless one wishes to consider the erotic literature, as, for example, Anais Nin has produced. Nevertheless, it is true that societal bans have been incorporated into the literature. Hemingway toys with the homosexual issue in "Big Two-Hearted River," but his short story and inferences exist solely in the realm of symbolism. Until recently very few American authors, regardless of ethnic origin, have focussed on this subject. Possibly Nathaniel West in *Miss Goody Two Shoes* with the creation of a male fulfilling a female role borders on homosexuality. And of course James Baldwin's *Another Country* deals honestly and straightforwardly with the issue, building his story around a homosexual protagonist. Recently we have seen a flurry of authors tackle the subject, as Marge

Piercy does in *Small Change*. In this novel the protagonist, Beth, finally finds her identity and satisfaction in the Mexican, Wanda. On an international level, the French, always *avant garde*, have pioneered in the area with Gide and much more artistically and fully with Genet. Genet's entire literary outpouring encompasses the gay world: the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the homosexual hero.

Since the subject of homosexuality has, as our author verifies, been generally ignored or at best ridiculed in Western literature, it is not surprising that Chicano literature, a developing consciousness, has not dealt widely with the subject. To have done so might have distracted the public from the major issue: Chicanismo. Chicano authors have been concerned for the most part with presenting a protest to the *status quo*, a philosophy, or a proposal for existence in an alien world. It is understandable, then, that the primary thrust has been either a realistic reflection of a perceived or idealized Chicano life, or a metaphoric escape from an unbearable situation. Now it may be that such homosexual parries as the critic suggests do occur frequently among males in the barrio, but, rightly or wrongly, authors have been writing to what they saw as "more pertinent matters." Undoubtedly some oversimplified concept of "machismo" has precluded the widespread treatment of the homosexual in the literature, except in derogatory terms. Nevertheless, a beautifully abstract and symbolic novel like Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* gives a very sympathetic and moving portrayal of the society of men. The emphasis lies on the societal rather than the sexual aspects of such a relationship, not to deny the homosexual, although that may occur in the banter, but to foster the brotherhood. I do not suggest that Anaya creates the "El Hombre" for which the critic pleads; he certainly does not. In that book, as in many books by Chicano authors sexuality is not the issue. In Anaya's book we do not know the sexual preference of most of the characters. Certainly the heterosexuals do not fare too well. In a sense the ambiance of the Socratic dialogues has been introduced as a backdrop for a movement toward Chicano solidarity and ultimate triumph. The purpose is not to focus on differences in the community, but to unify all Chicanos, regardless of their differences, into a single people. Idealistic? Of course. Impossible? Probably. But given the purposes for which most Chicanos have written, it is not surprising that the homosexual has been given only fleeting traditional treatment. Women have fared no better. French literature has developed over many centuries to a point at which it could deal with individual differences artistically without the need to protest or prove.

However, one work which our critic has not considered and which does treat the homosexual sympathetically is Estela Portillo's *Day of the Swallows*. Although the title of this critical work specifies "prose works," we may admit drama which is not poetic. In this drama, laid in the village of Lago de San Lorenzo, Doña Josefa, a very proper matriarch, confesses her love relationship with Alysea. Prior to her confession, she had had a servant's tongue cut out to prevent her affair being known. It is true that Josefa does not reveal her sexual preference publicly; in fact, she suffers some guilt feeling because of it. All of this, the societal milieu, the inner struggles of the lesbian, fit the situation described in the third point of Reinhardt's summation, except for a significant modification. The "bad one" is nullified by a magnificently transcendent scene in which the sexual "offender," gowned in flowing white robes, floats dead upon a sparkling blue lake under a flawless sky. At the end we have these stage directions:

The voices of the choir, the church bell, the birds on the tree in full life, and the almost unearthly light streaming through the windows give the essence of a presence in the room. . .of something beautiful.

The homosexual love becomes victory, not defeat; the drama is not defiance but glorification.

It might prove valuable to continue research on this subject in three ways:

- 1) Explore contemporary American fiction to discover *if* and *how* Chicano homosexuals are treated.
- 2) Trace the development of the homosexual as the theme parallels the growing confidence of Chicano authors.
- 3) Compare the treatment of homosexuals in mainstream literature and Chicano literature.

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